

Message Text

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12

ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03

SS-15 USIA-15 ACDA-19 DRC-01 NIC-01 /141 W

----- 024537

R 210815Z SEP 73

FM AMEMBASSY LISBON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8497

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL LOURENCO MARQUES

AMCONSUL LUANDA

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL PONTA DELGADA

AMEMBASSY ROME

USMISSION NATO

AMCONSUL OPORTO

C O N F I D E N T I A L LISBON 3459

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PO

SUBJ: DISUNITY IN RANKS OF PORTUGUESE OPPOSITION; GOP MOVES
TO PREVENT CANDIDATES FROM WITHDRAWING

REF: A) LISBON A-66, APRIL 20, 1973

B) LISBON A-70, APRIL 20, 1973

SUMMARY: OPPOSITIONIST ELECTORAL COALITION HAS SPLIT
APART AND PROBABLY WILL NOT BE REPAIRED. COMMUNISTS
AND THEIR SUPPORTERS VIRTUALLY ALONE IN PRE-ELECTION
ACTIVITIES. DESPITE DECREE-LAW PUNISHING WITHDRAWAL
BEFORE ELECTION, COMMUNIST-DOMINATED OPPOSITION GROUPS
IN SEVERAL DISTRICTS PLAN TO PRESENT CANDIDATES WHO MAY
WITHDRAW AT LAST MINUTE. END SUMMARY

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1. TRADITIONAL PORTUGUESE ELECTORAL OPPOSITION GROUPING OF PROGRESSIVE CATHOLICS, SOCIALISTS, AND COMMUNISTS, WHICH REACHED A HIGH POINT OF COHESION AT THE "CONGRESS OF DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION" HELD AT AVEIRO IN APRIL, HAS SPLIT APART AND PROBABLY WILL REMAIN DIVEDED UNTIL NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS. AT RECENT LISBON MEETING, CONFLICT OVER IDEOLOGICAL CONTENT OF ELECTORAL PLATFORM PECIPITATED WALKOUT BY MOST NON-COMMUNIST DELEGATES EXCEPT FOR SOME REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MARIO SOARES SOCIALIST FACTION.

2. OPPOSITIONIST FORCES, NOW DOMINATED BY THE FAR LEFT, HOLD THAT WHILE THE "OPPRESSIVE FASCIST DICTATORSHIP" WILL NOT ALLOW FAIR ELECTIONS, A GREAT DEAL CAN BE GAINED FROM PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN. THEY HAVE STRESSED THAT PARTICIPATION DID NOT NECESSARILY IMPLY THAT THEY WOULD MAINTAIN CANDIDACIES TO THE END OR GO TO THE POLLS. THE COMMUNISTS STAND TO PROFIT MOST FROM THE PARTICIPATION OF THE OPPOSITION IN THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN. THEY HAVE A CLANDESTINE APPARATUS TO STRENGTHEN, AND THEY SEEK TO REACH SPECIAL AUDIENCES LIKE WORKERS AND STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL MESSAGES WHOSE DISSEMINATION IS NORMALLY PROHIBITED (I.E. THE CLASS STRUGGLE, THE NATURE OF FASCISM, ETC.). NON-COMMUNIST OPPOSITIONISTS SEE LITTLE PROFIT TO THEMSELVES IN PARTICIPATING, AND DO NOT WANT TO ADORN ELECTION PROCESS AND INEVITABLE GOVERNMENT LANDSLIDE.

3. IN FACE OF OPPOSITIONIST PLANS, GOP ISSUED DECREE-LAW SEPT. 13 PROVIDING FOR PENALTIES TO BE IMPOSED ON OPPOSITIONISTS WHO DECIDE AT LAST MINUTE TO WITHDRAW FROM ELECTIONS. LOSS OF POLITICAL RIGHTS (VOTE OR HOLD OFFICE) FOR FIVE YEARS IS IMPOSED ON PERSONS WHO A) ACCEPT CANDIDACY, SIGN CANDIDATES' PETITIONS, OR ARE MEMBERS OF DISTRICT "PARTY" COMMITTEES, AND B) SUBSEQUENTLY PUBLICALLY STATE INTENTION TO WITHDRAW FROM ELECTION, OR INCITE VOTERS TO ABSTAIN. DECREE-LAW ALSO MAKES INELIGIBLE FOR NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERSHIP PERSONS WHO WERE CANDIDATES IN PREVIOUS ELECTIONS AND WHO WITHDREW OR CALLED FOR ABSTENTION. THIS SECTION APPEARS TO BE RETROACTIVE; LAWYERS SAY IT WILL PROBABLY BE TESTED IN COURTS SHOULD ANY CANDIDATES BE BARRED BY IT.

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4. LISTS OF OPPOSITIONIST CANDIDATES FOR AVEIRO, CASTELO BRANCO, LERIEA, LISBON AND OPORTO HAVE NOW BEEN PUBLISHED BUT INCLUDE NO PROMINENT POLITICAL FIGURES, EXCEPT JOSE MANUEL TENGARRINHA, LONG-TIME COMMUNIST LEADER. LISTS COMPOSED PRINCIPALLY OF WORKERS, STUDENTS, LAWYERS AND WRITERS. THOSE FEW NAMES FAMILIAR TO EMBASSY ARE CONSIDERED BY US TO BE COMMUNISTS OR PRO-COMMUNISTS,

POLITICAL SOURCES STATE THAT LISTS COMPOSED ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY OF COMMUNISTS AND SYMPATHIZERS, EXCEPT FOR OPORTO LIST, WHICH IS SAID TO INCLUDE SOME SOCIALISTS OF MARIO SOARES GROUP. SOARES SUPPORTERS IN LISBON, SUCH AS PERENNIAL AND PROMINENT CANDIDATES FRANCISCO SALGADO ZENHA (LAWYER) AND RAUL REGO (PUBLISHER), ARE NOT CANDIDATES THIS TIME AND REPORTEDLY PLAN NO PART IN ELECTION CAMPAIGN. OTHER PROMINENT SOCIALISTS LIKE VICTOR WENGOROVIVUS AND JORGE SAMPAIO, WHO RAN IN 1969, ARE SITTING OUT THIS ELECTION. AS BEST WE CAN TELL NONE OF THE 43 OPPOSITION CANDIDATES NAMED SO FAR RAN IN 1969. BY NOT NOMINATING PROMINENT PERSONS, OPPOSITION HAS BLUNTED EFFECT OF NEW DECREE-LAW'S PENALTIES FOR LAST-MINUTE WITHDRAWALS: LOSS OF POLITICAL RIGHTS FOR THESE CANDIDATES WOULD BE NO HARD-SHIP FOR OPPOSITION.

5. WELL KNOWN LEFT-WING SOCIALIST LEADER FRANCISCO PEREIRA DE MOURA AND RESPECTED OPPOSITIONIST PROFESSOR LINDLEY CINTRA, BOTH IMPORTANT FIGURES ON NON-COMMUNIST LEFT, ARE AMONG 5 PERSONS DESIGNATED AS "ALTERNATES" FOR CANDIDATES ON LISBON LIST. PEREIRA DE MOURA, WHO HAD ADVISED OPPOSITION AGAINST PRESENTING ANY CADIDATES THIS YEAR, MAY HAVE FELT THAT SOME MINIMAL GESTURE WAS REQUIRED TO HEAD OFF HOSTILITY OF COMMUNISTS, ASSOCIATION WITH WHOM HE DOES NOT AVOID.

6. OPPOSITION GROUPS IN TWO DISTRICTS, BEJA AND GUARDA, HAVE ANNOUNCED THEY WILL NOT PRESENT CANDIDATES. OPPOSITION HAS NEVER ENJOYED SIGNIFICANT SUPPORT IN THESE TWO DISTRICTS, AND WE HAVE NEVER HEARD OF COMMUNIST PARTY ACTIVITY IN EITHER. NEVERTHELESS, OPPOSITION GROUPS IN 12 OTHER DISTRICTS HAVE ISSUED PUBLIC APPEAL TO BEJA AND GUARDA GROUPS TO RECONSIDER THEIR DECISION.
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7. IT PRESENTLY UNCLEAR WHETHER APPARENT RETROACTIVE FEATURE OF RECENT DECREE IS AFFECTING SELECTION OF OPPOSITION CANDIDATES. THOSE CANDIDATES ON WHO WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO CHECK DID NOT RUN IN 1975 (THE LAST ELECTION IN WHICH THERE WERE WITHDRAWALS).

8. COMMENT: WHILE DECREE-LAW WAS INTENDED TO SPARE GOP THE PAIN OF THE KIND OF INTERNATIONAL DOMESTIC CRITICISM WHICH HAS ATTENDED THE MASSIVE WITHDRAWAL OF OPPOSITION CANDIDATES IN YEARS PAST, DECREE-LAW ITSELF HAS GENERATED SOME UNFAVORABLE PUBLICITY ALREADY. IN ADDITION, OPPOSITION, WEAK, DIVIDED AND NARROWLY BASED THOUGH IT IS, APPEARS TO HAVE SIDE-STEPPED THE PUNCH BY NAMING NON-ENTITIES.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 21 SEP 1973
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: golinofr
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973LISBON03459
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS UNKNOWN
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: LISBON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19730919/aaaaansq.tel
Line Count: 170
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: A) LISBON A-66, APRIL 20, 1973
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: golinofr
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21 SEP 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <21-Sep-2001 by rowellE0>; APPROVED <28-Nov-2001 by golinofr>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: DISUNITY IN RANKS OF PORTUGUESE OPPOSITION; GOP MOVES TO PREVENT CANDIDATES FROM WITHDRAWING
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PO
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005